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LETTER DATED 21 FEBRUARY 2000 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AZERBAIJAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

On instruction from my Government, I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of a statement issued on 15 February 2000 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Eldar KOULIEV
Permanent Representative

00-30894 (E) 220200 220200

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Annex

Statement issued on 15 February 2000 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan

[Original: Russian]

According to a report by the Interfax news agency dated 10 February 2000, the "prime minister" of the so-called "Nagorny Karabakh republic", Mr. A. Danielyan, on 11 February 2000 began a "business visit" to several Western European countries. The visit was arranged at the invitation of businessmen from Italy, Switzerland and Hungary. According to the agency's report, the purpose of the visit is to encourage a number of European companies to invest in Nagorny Karabakh's economy for its development, present a programme for the development of the agro-industrial complex and mining industry and the promotion of tourism in Nagorny Karabakh, and attempt to establish joint enterprises.

In this connection, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, appealing to the Governments and business and financial circles of all countries, states that, as a result of Armenia's military aggression against Azerbaijan, 20 per cent of Azerbaijani territory, including the Nagorny Karabakh region, has been occupied by the Armenian armed forces. Those territories have been subjected to ethnic cleansing, as a result of which over 1 million Azerbaijanis were forcibly expelled from their homes and have become refugees and displaced persons in their own country. Armenia, which seized power in the Nagorny Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, and the illegitimate regime that it established about 10 years ago, grossly violating international legal norms, continue to dictate their will to the international community. During these years, the aggressors caused US$ 22 billion in damages to the economy of Azerbaijan, and monuments of Azerbaijani history and culture in the region have been brutally destroyed and plundered.

The Armenian authorities have recently been attempting to take steps to strengthen the consequences of the military occupation through economic means, by bringing the separatist regime out of its political and economic isolation and deep political and socio-economic crisis. Thus, the leaders of the so-called "Nagorny Karabakh republic" have announced their Programme for the Rehabilitation and Development of Nagorny Karabakh and are seeking, through this "programme", to attract investors to the occupied territories. This programme, which the Armenian side, having carried out its policy of ethnic cleansing and looting in the region, is trying to implement, is nothing less than a crude and violent attempt to commit yet another violation of Azerbaijan's sovereignty, territorial integrity and economic security.

Azerbaijan is vitally interested in normalizing life in the region and in its comprehensive economic development. At the same time, such development will be possible only after a just and consistent settlement of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the achievement of the sides' complete agreement on peace, that is, the elimination of the principal consequences of the conflict. First and foremost, the occupied territories must be freed, all refugees and

displaced persons must return to their homes and the region's severed communications must be restored. The World Bank, the European Union and other influential international organizations have already expressed their readiness to make large-scale investments in the region, but only after the consequences of the occupation have been eliminated and peace has been achieved.

Over the past year, there have been some prospects for a peaceful settlement of the problem. In 1999 and 2000, the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia have been holding talks with a view to solving the problem through peaceful means and on the basis of mutual compromises. At their last meeting in Davos, Switzerland, they decided to continue the talks.

In the current circumstances, any form of cooperation with representatives of the illegitimate regime and the conduct in an inalienable part of Azerbaijan - the Nagorny Karabakh region - of any activities that contravene the laws of Azerbaijan, is a serious blow to the fragile peace that is being observed as a result of the intensive efforts of the sides.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs states that the Azerbaijani side views the establishment by representatives of any country or international economic and financial organizations of military, political or economic ties with the Nagorny Karabakh region of Azerbaijan before a peace agreement is reached as a violation of inter-State, intergovernmental and other bilateral agreements with Azerbaijan, considers this to be blatant interference in its internal affairs and calls upon all States and organizations not to undertake such disloyal measures, which are inconsistent with international legal norms. Otherwise, such measures may seriously damage ties between Azerbaijan and countries and organizations that provide any kind of support to the separatist regime.